REMINISCENCES

Dan Raymond

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North Coast Vintage Aviation Society

Oral History
NCVAS - 1

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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
of the
NORTH COAST VINTAGE AVIATION SOCIETY

PURPOSE

Much of the color of aviation is contained in memories of former aircrew members and others involved with flying. The aim of this oral history collection is to tap these memories and make them available to students, researchers, historians, and flying buffs. They are being collected and maintained under the auspices of the North Coast Vintage Aviation Society.

PROCEDURES

When the interviewer and the person to be interviewed agree to meet, they will discuss the general subject area to be covered, and the amount of time (roughly) to be spent. They will meet at a mutually agreeable time and place.

The interview will be taped by the interviewer. Once the taping is completed, the interviewer will transcribe the interview into a draft form with rough editing only.

The person who was interviewed will be given a draft copy to review. Changes, deletions, corrections, additions can be made on this draft copy, and the draft will be returned to the interviewer within a specified time period.

The interviewer will then include these changes in the final copy. The individual being interviewed will sign the release on the final copy stating that this has been approved. Barring any special instructions, the approved copy would be available to researchers or other readers at a predetermined location.

The individual who was interviewed will also be given a copy of the approved material. The disk from which the interview was printed and the audiotape disks will be stored with the approved copy by the North Coast Vintage Aviation Society.

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DAN RAYMOND

REMINISCENCES

24 January 1995

This is January 24, and we are at my home in McKinleyville. I'm about to talk with Dan Raymond. This is Mickey Strang. We're going to be talking a little bit about Army physicals, what they were like - initially and otherwise. How about it, Dan?

Yes, initially and otherwise. Of course, I received a letter from Franklin D. Roosevelt that said, "Greetings. You have been selected by a panel of your neighbors and friends to report for induction and training" and so I reported to 49 4th Street [San Francisco].

There there was a great crowd of people, a mixed bag of people. We checked in. We gave them our names and gave them the information they asked for and they said, "O. K., go take off your clothes." We didn't take everything off. We took off everything except our shorts. We took off our socks, but we didn't take off our shoes. We had shoes and shorts on. That physical was kind of a precursor to all of the physicals. There were great quantities of people and we stood in great long lines to take the physicals. There were some later. . . I'll get into that later. Let's just finish this one.

We hung our clothes on pegs, but no one was robbed or anything taken. When we finished the physical, if we passed it, they took us to the next room and swore us in. They said, "You can volunteer for the Marine Corps or you can volunteer for the Navy or you can take your chances with the Army." And I don't have any idea why I did what I did, but I took my chances with the Army and was assigned to the Air Corps later on.

That physical was not too unusual. When we reported, we had 7 days to show up at Third and Townsend in San Francisco, at the railroad station, at 7 in the morning. We

showed up at 7 in the morning, and I for the life of me, I can't remember why it took us until 7 that night to get to Monterey 125 miles away, but it did.

You rode the train.

Well, yes. Of course. Right on.

That's the answer.

But we got to. . . I'm getting back to the subject of physicals. We got to Monterey. It was an old, permanent regular Army place. Presidio of Monterey had been established, I guess, back in the 1700s some time and it was good old regular Army. They had these buildings with the great verandahs and they herded the whole bunch of a hundred or more of us on the porch of this verandah, in the dark. They said, "All right, now we're going to have another little inspection." I don't know if you're familiar with what they call "short arms" So they explained how they do a short arm. That is, you would peel your foreskin back and you would milk your penis down. And, of course, that was a big shock because I'd had never even thought or heard of such a thing. I was just. . . I had only graduated from high school a few days before. You know, I wasn't a man of the world.

So we finally got through this thing. I think it was embarrassing to do this at first with people sitting there at a table watching you do it. Then, believe it or not, before we could eat we had to have a haircut. Well, there's a right way and a wrong way and the Army way. So we got a haircut and that was one of my first experiences with the Army way. Being right-handed, the part - you can hardly see it now because I don't have much hair - but I do have a part on the left side of my head. And the barber, that's in quotes, by the way, "barber", because I don't think he was, put the part on the right side of the head, which made it interesting to comb. My hair wasn't trained that way and it wouldn't do anything except stand up. I protested, and he said, "Well, you can pay 35 cents and get a professional haircut," which I did the next day. I wore a butch for the 30 years after that. I had to get a butch because there was no other way to make my hair lie down.

On that same subject, in the normal way for the short arm inspections, and I thought they were kind of. . . well, I don't think they were funny, but they would burst into the barracks at 2 o'clock in the morning, and they would yell, "Drop your cocks, grab your socks and then you can get back in bed." That meant you had to stand by your bed with nothing on and they would come by. They would walk by, and they would take a look at

you as you performed the little short arm exercise. The idea, of course, was to catch guys who may have had gonorrhea, catch them without having the time to prepare themselves for inspection.

There was another way they used to do it. By the way, a little story on that, on that particular procedure. Years later, or a year later, we had gone through all our basic training. We had gone the through gunnery school. We had been formed into crews and we were shipped off to Second Air Force at Casper, Wyoming. We got in there at about 11 o'clock at night. That's another one of those days. We're at Denver - on the train - in the morning. As I recall, it was about 8 o'clock we were in Denver. And Casper is not all that far. It's hardly a cross-country trip, but we didn't get to Casper until about 11 o'clock at night. So, finally, they sent us into these buildings to get some sleep. We turned the lights out and five minutes later, here we are, short arm inspection. And they did half the barracks and then some other guys came in and said, "O.K., we're going to have a show down inspection." Now, a show down inspection was to look at your equipment. So we were laboriously - a bunch of naked men - getting their equipment out. Somebody said, "I think we're in the wrong barracks. Aren't you guys shipping out?" And we said, "No, we just got here an hour ago." They said, "Oh, we've been looking for some guys who have been stealing tools." So, at that point, they finally turned the lights out and we went to back to sleep. Right way, wrong way, and the Army way.

Also, on the same subject of that particular physical examination. At Keesler Field they used to have a wonderful way of doing it. They would have us fall out dressed in raincoats and shoes. That's all. No socks, and no clothing under the raincoat. And they normally had an empty room or an empty barracks of some sort, and we'd all line up there single file, you know. We were soldiers, after all. We'd line up single file and you'd go in there and you'd stand before this group and you would have to take off your raincoat and your shoes. What they were looking for not only was gonorrhea but I think they were looking for syphilis because they wanted to see your body to see if you had lesions of any sort or whatever, and they also wanted to see if you had athlete's foot, which we all had. But it was. . .

No inspection for dandruff?

By George, I don't think any of us had that much hair. I was a burr-head at that time. I'll tell you, I didn't have much hair. In fact, my haircut in those days was kind of like the haircut the kids have today in the Army. You know, the whitewalls? Hair was just a bother and we can get into that. . . .

But physicals, when we got to Salt Lake City, I'd finished basic training. I'd finished aircraft and engine mechanic's school. I'd finished gunnery school, and I went to Salt Lake City for a replacement depot where they would make up the crews and we had a physical there that kind of took its toll on a lot of people, including me.

We were told to report at one particular time. Typical thing that you read on the bulletin board. We went up there. We weren't much for marching in formations. We just went where you were supposed to go. This was to a hangar. We went into the hangar. They said, "Take off all your clothes and hang them up there." So we did. And we again had our shoes on, and that's all. We paraded around this hangar, and the room was full of men, and people conducting the physical. You're standing in line for sometimes 15 minutes for a single procedure. By this time we were inured. Nobody was very bashful anymore because some of the people in there doing the physical were nurses. You know, we were all standing around. So I was there, I think, for about 5 hours in this big old drafty hangar. It was about zero degrees outside, and it wasn't warm in the hangar. So we finally finished the physical (these were flight physicals). A lot of us then proceeded to go out and get pneumonia. I did. And then that brings me to a thing about sick leave or sick call.

I reported one morning up to the dispensary because I really didn't feel very well. So I went in and they said, "Well, you've got a little fever, but you can return to duty." I was going outside. It was really cold outside and had been snowing. I slipped on the front steps of the dispensary and went head first into a snow bank. It felt so good I lay there a while just to melt a little bit of snow around me because I was so hot. Pretty soon I got pulled out of the snow bank by no less than a bird colonel. "What are you doing in the snow bank, Sergeant?" I said, "Gee, I slipped and fell in there, Sir. It felt kind of good and I thought I'd relax just for a minute before I got out of the snow bank." And he said, "Well, are you on sick call?" And I said, "Yes, but they told me to return to duty." He said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, " I feel awful hot." So he took me back inside and

I had 105° temperature. He asked the Captain who had sent me back to duty, "Why did you send this man back to duty? He's got 105° temp." He said, "Well, the hospital is full; we've got no place to put him, and so we thought we'd send him back to duty." So they sent me to Camp Kerns 100 miles away. Naturally, I ended up in the venereal disease ward.

I say naturally, because I was in the hospital twice while the Army and both times I was in the venereal disease ward. I had a funny experience on that, too. But, anyway, I finally got out of Camp Kerns and was sent home in an ambulance. I got back and reported in the orderly room. I think someone had been chewed a little bit because when I got back to the orderly room, I was sent directly to KP. Somebody had been embarrassed by this whole thing, I think. I managed to pull KP on Christmas Eve and on Christmas Day and on New Year's Eve and on New Year's Day, and every other day for the rest of the time I was at Salt Lake City, proving that you didn't want to go on sick call. Or, at least, if you went on sick call, don't go on sick call when you're sick. I learned from that, and I never went on sick call again.

I mentioned another time. There was a time at Casper, Wyoming. We were flying in a venerable old B-24. We were anxious to fly because it was the end of February and none of us had any flight time that month. We wanted our flying pay. We got our four hours and we wanted to land at Casper where we were stationed but we couldn't because of the blizzard. We didn't have enough fuel to get to Amarillo. We couldn't get to Denver. Of course, they wanted us to go to Amarillo or to a field in Montana and I frankly can't . . . Helena, I think, but I can't remember really where it was. But there was a military field in Amarillo, Texas that could receive us or, in an emergency, of course, we could go to a civilian field, except that there were none of them open and we didn't have any gas left. So we landed in the darn blizzard. We landed in snow, and that was an experience because we'd never done that before and we fervently hoped we never would again.

So, we got in and this was a little problem because you have to feed the troops. All the mess halls were closed because it was way past the time . . . and so they sent us, the whole crew, to an officers' mess. And they had some delicious ham. The only problem with the ham was the ptomaine poisoning. Later in the day, a lot of us went into Casper and I got deathly sick in there. In fact, I was sick on the way coming home from town. I

got on the bus and started back to the airfield, and a B-24 came right over the bus, almost hitting the bus. It crashed into a warehouse right alongside of the bus. I didn't even look. I was too sick. So I went right to the orderly room and told them I was sick and so they sent me down to the hospital to the venereal disease ward.

Eventually our whole crew showed up. The pilot, the copilot, no navigator at the time, the bombardier, and all of the enlisted men. And we were all in a row in the venereal disease ward. There weren't very many venereal diseases there. They gave each of us two buckets: one to sit on and one to throw up in. And we were cheap to have because they couldn't feed us. The only thing they would give us occasionally was an ice cube if we promised to let any of it trickle down our throats. And, of course, we all did. Immediately we did that, we got violently ill. We were there for about three days, I guess.

I remember one time a group of ladies from town were touring the hospital. You know, the community leaders, the Casper Monday Club or something, and they came through here they were all giving the tck-tck-tck. These poor boys in the venereal disease ward. Gee, they look so nice otherwise! All we had was ptomaine poisoning. That was my second and last time in the military in a medical facility. I tried to stay away from them as much as possible.

I guess the only other physical was after I returned from combat. They sent us down to the Edgewater Club in Santa Monica. Our only duty there was, after a week you were supposed to read the bulletin board every day. You could go in in the morning and you could order steak for breakfast and they'd serve you steak for breakfast. They'd serve you anything you asked for, as a matter of fact. It was really very deluxe treatment. After a week, you had to undergo another physical to see if you were still fit to fly, which we did. At that time, you also had a very stringent dental check. They fixed every hole in your head. You know, all the cavities and anything like that, they fixed while you were there. That was really tough duty! But, unfortunately, I took the physical and the next day we shipped out and I went again to beautiful Keesler Field in Biloxi-by-the-Bay.

The Air Force had something against me because I always ended up somehow at Keesler Field. But I had nothing really exciting about physicals except the surprise - oh, you know, talk about the short arm inspections, we had them in training. We didn't have any overseas. We didn't have any when we came back. I always thought, isn't that a silly

inspection to have, that thing with the raincoats and shoes, because anybody that had gonorrhea would certainly get rid of any traces of the gonorrhea before he finished standing in that line for an hour and a half. He would go into the latrine and take care of it. I don't know. Maybe I was thinking more rationally.

It probably was a case where the square got checked.

Right.

Your know, the process, the whole process of going into the military in 1943 - which is when I went in - February 1, 1943, was untying or cutting Mama's apron strings. They were trying to make us people who would obey the orders that were given to us and they wanted us to become men, I guess. At least, they wanted us to become soldiers. They did a lot of things that were kind of shocking to us, but I was never worried about being around with a whole bunch of people actually with no clothes on because when I was in high school - I went to Berkeley High - we were just little kids then. We thought we were big men. The boys swam twice a week there. We had two Olympic-sized pools, one for the girls and one for the boys. The boys were prohibited from wearing a suit. I mean, we all swam in the nude, which is fine, unless you had a doctor's order that you had to wear something.

The gym that we dressed in when I went to Long Beach Poly High and, 400 girls per hour because there were that many kids, you all were required to shower together.

Yes, we did, too. It's really a trauma for kids to do that, too, because they've been at home with a whole family. They just aren't used to that. Boy, you sure get used to it in the military.

The sex lectures - that makes me think about one of the things we're going to talk about, about marching. One of the things, "The Sergeant's Got a Dose of Clap" is one of the things we used to sing.

Now, every time you went to a new base, the first thing that happened, you got the flight surgeon in there. . . .Well, in basic training you got a sergeant, but later on as we were getting to be trained troops, you got a flight surgeon and he'd tell you all about things I'd never heard about in my whole life. You know, chancres and chancroid and all about these various and hideous and horrible diseases that we would certainly catch if we ever

were so stupid as to try to make physical love to a young lady, especially a prostitute. Actually, it kind of scared you becuase they'd show you these horrible movies.

*There is on on syphilis that was done in glorious living Technicolor by the Army that I saw in classes that I took at SC that, if you had some kid fresh in that was bright-*eyed *and bushy-tailed, would be enough to send him in a state of shock.*

Exactly! And not only that, you see, I was. . . my father, I asked my father about sex and his answer was, "well, it was kind of dirty." And I asked my mother and she said, "well, it's something that women have to do." And that was my whole sex lecture, and so I was completely and absolutely and utterly naive and I had never made love to a girl. My relationship with girls had been more or less one of friends. But I really didn't know anything about girls. And I went in the Army and the first thing I hear is all the horrible things about girls. Because they could give you these terrible diseases. Of course, they also mentioned that we could give them to the girls.

They scared me, they really did, because I was a naive kid. I was 18 years old. My 18th birthday was on the 26th of October 1943 and I was a senior in high school. I was half year back because I went to 18 schools my first nine years. After I'd finished the first half of the first grade, we left San Francisco and went to Portland. In San Francisco I'd learned how to read using the sight reading method. I got to Portland and all the kids were reading with phonics. I was put back a half a grade because I couldn't read in phonics. I didn't know what a phonic was. So I was still in high school on my 18th birthday, which was in October. We had 30 days to sign up for the draft, so that gave me till the end of November. Then it took the wheels of the bureaucracy about 30 days to grind and so sometime in the middle of December I got my notice to report to 49 4th Street.

Anyway, the way the time developed in getting drafted was, I graduated from high school on the last weekend in January 1944 on a Friday, and I went in the Army on Monday, so I had a long period of living as a civilian after I graduated from high school.

Then, of course, there was the time in gunnery school when all of us kids went to Nuevo Laredo. They had an area over there called "Boy's Town," which was a red light district. I'll tell you, you had to be, I would think, terribly desperate if you were going to patronize any of the girls there because the places were. . . . We'd been living in the antiseptic and sterile environment of an Army camp, and these places were filthy. I mean,

they were filthy! And the girls didn't look much better. But, it was kind of fun to go. A group of three of us went together. I have a photograph someplace taken of us in Boy's Town in Nuevo Laredo. Some guy got a couple of pesos for taking it or something. We're a really crummy looking group, as a matter of fact. But, they did their job, as far as I was concerned, because I stayed away from it while I was in because. . . . I've got a good conduct ribbon, which meant that I didn't catch anything. Well, that's what the good conduct ribbon really meant.

We used to make a lot of jokes about it, and we, of course, we used to talk a lot about it, but I think most of us were pretty Puritan, really. It was a different generation, and we didn't mess around too much, really.

I think there was probably a lot of difference between World War II and Korea on that. By the time of the Korean situation, there had been some fairly profound attitude changes that had already occurred.

Well, one other thing, too. By 1940, they came out with sulfanilamide, and about 1943, they came out with penicillin that was supposed to cure everything. It made a difference. You just knew. . . . And one other thing is, when we were trained men and when we were on an air crew, we didn't want to do anything to jeopardize it. It's hard to explain to people this gung-ho attitude that we had. We had a very positive attitude. We knew that the losses were horrendous, et cetera, but we wanted to be there. We wanted to do what we were doing and we wanted to be the very best we could. And all these things had a. . . .

When I was in England, one of the things that you did on pass was to go down to Picadilly Circus and the place was swarming with what they called "Picadilly Commandos." Of course, these were prostitutes and their identity cards said that their occupation was "satisfying soldiers on leave." This is legal in England. And these. . . they came in all sizes and shapes, and, of course, you couldn't see them because it was dark. It was blackout, you know. You had to say that it was the easiest thing in the whole world to secure if you wanted to be so.

I briefly went with a girl in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, or, as they called it, the ATS, the Army Tail Service. I met this girl in a bar. I saw her a couple of times, but, I'll tell you, she was stationed at a place called Swiss Cottage. It was a long way on the Tube.

One of the times that I took her home, I said good-bye to her at the gate to her establishment there, and I went back to the Tube to find out that I'd just missed the last train. And so I walked the rest of the night to get back to downtown London where I had a room. It was a long way. I'm surprised I didn't get lost. At one time I was picked up by a Buick Limited, a great big Buick limousine that belonged to the American Ambassador. They saw me on the street and picked me up and gave me a ride, which I was very pleased to take because my feet were getting tired. But those girls. . . the British girls, I don't know if she really liked me or if she was anxious to get pregnant and to get out of England. A lot of the girls did want to get to the United States and I was just very careful. As a matter of fact, I was very careful about my relationships with all the girls there and I never once took advantage of it. So, again, Puritan upbringing, I guess.

Well, it was too much to lose, much too much. And, of course, I didn't have any time to lay around after I finished my tour of duty because they were short of beds and I finished my tour and shipped out right away.

So you came right straight back to the States as soon as you'd finished, then?

Yes.

This is off the subject entirely. We went to a replacement depot, the whole crew. We didn't ship out on the same set of orders, but we shipped out on the same day, and I have no idea why they had my orders here and some of the other guys in the crew here, but we all shipped out on the same day. We went to a place near Liverpool and my pilot tells me the name of the place was Chorley.

I got off the train in Chorley and reported in. I can't remember whether I spent overnight there or not, but about the next day, anyway, I was on another train heading for Prestwick, Scotland. There I caught an ancient C-54 and flew back to the United States.

The same day I left, my pilot and copilot were combing that replacement depot for me. They had walked in there and had been snagged and told that they had a new assignment, and to find their flight engineer and radio operator. They never did find Johnny Lindquist either. So, failing to find us, why, they found another flight engineer who had volunteered to fly with them and another radio operator. And they were sent to a place called Horsham St. Faith, which was a big old permanent RAF base. At Horsham St. Faith, they gave them a brand, spanking new B-24 that had no guns, and the bomb bay had

a floor put in. They took the bomb shackles out, and it had a floor. There were four of these B-24s there, and there were four crews of four men. They said, O.K., now, over there is that mountain of gas cans. Sitting by it was a squad of Royal Marines or whatever they were, they were British troops. If you take your airplanes over there, these guys will load those airplanes full of gas cans. Your operating altitude will be 100 feet.

Anyway, they said, you will fly, the suggested procedure is, you will fly until you detect that the troops and the equipment under you are German. Then turn back and land the first place you can and tell them that you have gasoline, because this is an emergency thing. So, Duane Hall and Nick Hattel, my pilot and copilot, did this for something like two months, I think. They lost one airplane. It hit a tree. But they would land in any place they could, or airfields if they could find them.

One time they landed at a field in France, and there was nobody around at all. After a while, some C-47s flew over and parachutes came out and. . . oh, they were sitting there, these two B-24s. Duane said they were sitting on top of the wing. They had the airplane full of gas and they wanted to get rid of the thing. Pretty soon these parachutes came down and then after a while they heard some noise and a squad came through the trees over there in back of them, and those guys are being very alert. So Duane stands up and says, "Hey, over here." Now, Duane, you have to understand, is from Tennessee. Nothing sounds like somebody from Tennessee, except now he's in Georgia, which is worse. And Duane was about 6 feet tall; I guess, soaking wet he must have weighed about 125 pounds. A big guy, you know, like a willow rod. "Hey, over here." And, of course, he had his cap on with a big old gold device on it, so he could see. Now, I know, otherwise they looked pretty raunchy, I imagine.

This sergeant came on and says, "Who the hell are you?" He said, "I'm Lt. Duane Hall, First Lt. Duane Hall of the 8th Air Force and I have two airplanes of gasoline to give to you people." The guy says, "I'll be go to hell. Wait a minute." And he sent somebody back, and, pretty soon, a major showed up. The major said, "What the hell's going on here?" And he said, "Well, I'm Lt. Duane Hall of the 8th Air Force. I've captured this field and I'm looking for somebody to turn it over to." The major did something and pretty soon a colonel showed up madder than hell. That was the objective of the day, you see. And this lieutenant of the 8th Air Force came in with gasoline and "captured" the field.

I was talking to Duane about this about 1991, and, to this day, he roars with laughter about this because everybody was so mad at him. He rained on their parade! They were going to capture this nice German airfield and they were going to get all sorts of accolades and maybe a medal or something then here's this pip-squeak first lieutenant out there with two airplanes with thousands of gallons of gasoline to give them. You know. . .

A little bit embarrassing.

He said when they were flying low, he told their flight engineer to get down in the nose and to yell if they were heading into a tree. Pretty soon the flight engineer came up and said, "I'm not going to do that. By the time I yell to tell you we're going to hit a tree, we've hit it." They were flying 160 miles an hour 100 feet up. He says, sometimes we flew it as high as 150 feet. Way up in the air!

I then reviewed this whole thing with Nick Hattel, who was the copilot. He lives in Colorado now. He thinks it was just absolutely, tremendously funny.

But, like I say, they had four airplanes to do all this. They replaced it with a lot of other operations, but this was like they would do at China Lake. They built something quick that would work. And so this was quick and it worked. They lost one of these B-24s. It hit a tree. And no one was hurt, except the B-24.

That's amazing. It was empty, I trust?

Yes, the gasoline was gone. They carried more jerry cans of gasoline, 5-gallon cans, to the Continent than he said you'd ever seen. And they would land. . . Oh, and he said, they got nobody to give them supplies. There was no way to get maintenance. They had to do their own. He said, "I wished I'd had you." Of course, I was pretty good doing maintenance on the -24. They had no maintenance. They had no way to get paid or fed. And they told them at Horsham St. Faith to ask the troops and they'll give you a K-ration. Well, they wouldn't, because every day they'd issue the guys three: one for breakfast, one for lunch, and one for dinner. If they gave one to Duane, why, they wouldn't have either breakfast, lunch or dinner. So what they would do is land at places like Hethel, where they were known, and say, "Could we bum a meal?" They couldn't pay for it because they had no money. They hadn't been paid for a couple of months. But they would land at these various places. They'd taxi up to the old hardstand where we used to fly and say, "Hey,

Jess, this thing needs some help." And so Jess would fix it, Jess Johnson, the old master sergeant crew chief.

He said, "We had to scrounge for everything we got. We couldn't even, we weren't on the radio net." So he says, "We would take off and fly along and people would challenge us." He said, "We had the IFF and nobody ever shot at us, but," he says, "we were just completely out of the entire net."

By the way, he stayed in the Air Force and retired from the Air Force. I don't know what his rank was. I think it probably had to be a lieutenant colonel anyway. He was a very fine pilot. He took a discharge after World War II was over and was doing very well in his job. He was relieved when they recalled him for Korea. They gave him a C-54 and said, "Take it to Korea." And he flew C-54s, which he said the easiest airplane in the whole world to fly, all through Korea. Then after Korea, he was transferred to the Strategic Air Command and flew in B-47s.

He's a member of the North Coast Vintage Aviation. He sent me $10 the other day. We now span the continent.

Well, I notice you've got a category there, "You'll sing while you are marching." Not really too much funny with that. When I got to beautiful Keesler Field for basic training, we were told that we would sing while we were marching. We sang kind of the usual stuff: "I've Been Working on the Railroad," and "Rolling Home by the Light of the Silvery Moon," "Happy Is the Day when the Air Force Gets Its Pay and We Go Rolling, Rolling Home." Then, of course, innumerable versions of "Mademoiselle from Armentieres" and we could make a lot of good verses out of that.

We had a guy who did a lot of marching with us. I think that was in aircraft mechanic's school. His name was Eagle. Well, that was not really his name. That's what we called him. He had a voice that sounded like an eagle, but they don't actually have much of a voice. He had a squawking voice, and headed up the marches. We used to do a lot of singing with him.

I'm trying to think of the other songs we sang.

Of course, we always sang the "Air Force Hymn."

I imagine you sang a lot of the Brit songs: "I've Got Sixpence"...

Well, yes, that's the one, "Rolling Home. I've got sixpence, jolly, jolly sixpence. I've got sixpence to last me all my life."

And talk about marching, Keesler Field was an interesting place. It was good for me because I was a fat kid when I went in, and I'm a fat man now. But, the food was bad at Keesler. We fell out in the mornings for reveille, and then we fell out to march to the mess hall, singing all the time. When we got to the mess hall, they took the roll because you had to go to the mess hall. Most of the people just walked through the mess hall because you couldn't eat what they served in there usually. There were a few things that were good. Breakfast was the best meal of the day. But you had to march to the mess hall three times a day. And I managed to lose. . . . I weighed 240 pounds when I was drafted, and by the time I took my flying physical, I was in the 170s. I didn't eat anything, and they worked us hard. Of course, we only had to walk back from the mess hall. You do that singly. We didn't have to march.

If you didn't eat at the mess hall, was there any place you could get anything to eat?

Yes. There was a little PX garden that opened about 5 in the evening. They were about the size of the lot the house is on and they had little buildings on them and they had some tables outside. Of course, this is in beautiful Biloxi and if it wasn't raining, it was hot, so you could sit outside.

And be attacked by the mosquitoes?

Oh, is that what those were? We always thought that they were fighters out there from some other air base. We always said if three of them got together they could carry you off. They had more bugs there than you ever saw.

Anyway, I subsisted on that stuff for a long time, and I lost a lot of weight. They worked us hard, and so I grew in physical stamina eating a completely junk food diet.

The thing I liked best about the mess halls down there was the corn fritters that looked like the inside of a hand. That's how they were shaped. That's how they were made. You know, the guy took some in his hand and dropped it in the hot fat.

Did I tell you my little story about the fish?

Well, one time I was going to have something and eat at the mess hall and they had these little fish. They were about 8 inches long. I didn't want one of those, but, somehow, I

got one on my plate. What it was was a little fish that had been taken out of the net or whatever and had been dropped in some batter and then dropped in the hot grease. I got the thing, I cut the head off of it and I took the insides out of it. I skinned it and I took the bones out. And I ate the fish meat. And so I got to the china clipper, the place where they washed the trays, and this little second lieutenant said, "Soldier, did you take that fish?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "You will eat what you take here." So I had to stand there and eat the fish head and the guts and the whole. . . . And that's the last fish I ever ate in the entire service. I never ate fish again. I was afraid I'd have to eat fish heads and guts. I guess I didn't need fish.

But the mess halls at Keesler were pretty sad.

Talking about singing, they had a need to speed up the aircraft and engine mechanics school. We started in the morning at 8 o'clock and went until 4:30 or 5 at night. They double-shifted the school, which meant that we had to get up at 2 in the morning and we got to school at 3 or 3:30 and we got out of school at 1 or 1:30 in the afternoon. At this point, when we would be marching to class, why, we would sing lustily. Especially as we were passing through the area of the WAAC barracks because we were angry at the WAACs because they had complained that the troops all smelled bad.

In fact, the troops did smell bad, but we had very limited numbers of uniforms, and we had very limited washing facilities, and we had no laundry service at all. The WAACs had laundry service and they had more uniforms than we had. Not only that, they didn't do all these sweaty things that we did. So we sang lustily going through the WAAC barracks for about the first week, at which time we were told that we would not sing in the morning.

That school was interesting, too, because about that time. . . . I keep telling stories about the little second lieutenants, but the Army was full of these paddlefoot officers. I think at the time that I met them they had been in the Army for 92 days. Ninety days of that in OCS. And they were completely naive. We used to get back to our squadron area. We would go from the school, the mechanics school, to the mess hall and we'd come back from the mess hall. We'd get back to the squadron area at 2:30, let's say, in the afternoon. Well, there's one thing the Army cannot tolerate, and that's people sitting around. Normally speaking, you know, the Army's done pretty much for the day at 5 o'clock. They pull down the flag and have retreat and all that kind of good stuff and in the

peacetime,I think they used to shoot a cannon. So, anyway, we would get back at 2 o'clock, and we'd have lights out at 6 in the evening. It was still light outside if it was not in the dead of winter. So this little lieutenant looked and said, "What are all these troops doing sitting around? We' ll do some calisthenics." So he would drag us out at about 3 o'clock in the afternoon and he would keep us doing calisthenics until 5. Then the orderly room came up, and the story that I got, it was that they received letters from people, "How is my son? I haven't heard from him in two months?" And they would call you in and say, "Write home." "Well, I don't have time, sir." "Well, why don't you have time?" "Well, I get up at 2 o'clock in the morning. I go to school until 1:30. I get back to the squadron area at 2:30 and have to fall out for calisthenics until lights out." Because this little lieutenant had decided we couldn't be allowed to sit around. Yet that was the time we were supposed to be doing things like washing our clothes and writing letters home and shining our shoes and shining our brass and doing all that good soldier stuff. But we weren't allowed to do it. If you had to wash your clothes, you had to go out after lights out. You had to sneak out of bed after bed check and then you had to go into the latrine and wash your clothes during your sleeping time. So, finally, they decided we didn't need all those calisthenics that long. We could have a shorter day. That has nothing to do with singing while marching, does it?

No, but, again, it's the kind of thing you don't usually hear about.

Yes. Well, this guy was a real nice guy. After the calisthenics, we always had - with him - we always had a little song fest. We'd stand there in formation and bellow out these songs. I think we were terrible. We really were terrible.

Not exactly a group of happy campers at that time.

Well, no. No. Actually, the morale at Keesler Field was terrible. We pretty much didn't like the commanding officer. It was a training field, First Air Force, and it was, as portrayed in the military, a chicken place. They had all the rules and all the regulations. You couldn't get a pass. You were restricted to base, for heaven's sakes, for almost a year, unless you got transferred out of Keesler Field. I did my basic training there. After basic training, we had taken a whole battery of tests, and I was selected to go to B-24 specialist's school at Keesler Field. So I just moved across the street.

When we first got to Keesler, talking about Keesler Field, we lived in hutments. A hutment was about the size of a single car garage but twice as long. Instead of having

windows, it had screens on the side and it had these flaps that would let down and let up. All day long these flaps would be open. There was no heat in them. You had bunks along each side and then a series of bunks down the middle. The latrine was located down at the end of the block. We were fortunate. We were in the last hutment so our latrine was only about 100 feet away.

We were some of the lucky ones, because the guys across the street lived in tents. You may not think of Mississippi as being cold, but, let me tell you that in the winter, Mississippi is cold. And its especially cold if you have no place that you can ever get warm, such as living in a hutment. You couldn't go to bed. You couldn't sit on your bed because you couldn't dent it because it had to be left undented all day long, so there was no place to sit down. There was no place to go. There was no place to get warm. That was even true in the latrine because the latrine was cold, too. It was a hutment, and it had these open sides.

When we went to mechanics school, we were in a regular barracks. Had no heat there either, but at least it didn't have all the sides open, and you could get out of the wind. If it was raining, you'd really get pretty miserably cold out there. But we were all young and in good health and well fed, so we didn't have too much trouble that way, I think.

That reminds me of something else. You couldn't drink the water - well, yes, you could, but you shouldn't. We had Lister bags. Did you ever see a Lister bag? It looks like a large cow udder. It was made of, I'd say plasticized cotton today, but we didn't have plastics, so I don't know. I guess it was rubber-covered cotton, and it had four or five spigots under the bottom of it and it was located in a little stand in a 4 by 4 with a little roof over it and they kept water in it. These things were kind of grungy looking, but if you wanted water to drink, you filled your canteen with water out of the Lister bag. Keesler Field is built on a swamp. So, I remember one time we got up in the morning, and, lo and behold, we had all brand new Lister bags. Brand, spanking new, shiny Lister bags out there instead of the old grungy ones. So I went out there and got some water and there was ice in it! This is also a day on which General H. H. Arnold was going to be there with Air Vice Marshall Sir John Dill. We had been practicing to pass in review. You know, we'd go out there in the morning in the uniform of the day, which was Class A and it was so cold people were shivering all morning. In the afternoon we'd go othere in Class A with a big

old Army horse blanket overcoat on. By that time it would be 90° and so people would be falling over in a faint. We did that every day. We got out in the morning without a coat and and we got over there in the afternoon with the coats. Right way, wrong way, and the Army way. So after we had the review for General Arnold, we went back to the squadron area and all the Lister bags had been changed and we had the grungy ones again and all the ice was lying in the dirt. They had dumped out all that fresh water and all that ice, that beautiful ice. They had put regular water in the old Lister bags again and I was so disappointed! I just never forgave the Army for that. I thought they could have at least let us drink the ice.

Late in the day, I guess, it was warm.

Oh, yes. It was hot every afternoon. But then you'd settled in in your overcoat and in wool, you know, the Class A uniform is a wool blouse and a wool shirt and wool pants. Oh, man! They were good, warm. . . excellent quality clothes, really. But good and warm.

It was a fascinating place. At that time the field was a temporary base. I think they intended to make it permanent. There was no such thing as grass. Most of the barracks were things like tents and these hutments and they were later torn down. When I went back there in 1944, late '44, they had grass and they had trees and they had permanent barracks and it was really a different place. It was just as disagreeable, but it was a different place.

That reminded me so much of Lee Whitehead when he was giving that little poem about Beaufort. I have a video of that and I was making copies of it. My wife listened to it and she said, "That's how you feel about Biloxi, isn't it?" And I said, "Yup, that's exactly how I feel about Biloxi."

I have to give them one thing, though. We hated Keesler Field, but one of the greatest people I ever met in the Army, my old drill instructor, was there. He was a great man. He was a buck sergeant when I got there and he was a buck sergeant the last time I saw him in 1945. His name. . . golly. . . Sergeant Evans.

And the other thing is, they had an excellent school. I can remember so much of that school. I can remember day after day I'd just see it there, and see myself in that classroom again. They knew what they were doing in teaching us how to repair and keep a B-24 running. They made good mechanics out of us, regardless of all this other stuff we laugh about and talk about. The guys knew what they were doing that way. I have to give

them a vote of confidence. Oh, another thing about that school. The B-24 was a new airplane then, and we didn't have a lot of them. It was towards the end of my time there after becoming a B-24 specialist that I saw my first B-24 about a week before I graduated!

In the meantime, we worked on a collection of airplanes that would be worth a fortune today. Airplanes that people have never heard of, like Bell YFM-1 Airacuda. It was a pusher. Two Allisons. It had a three-man crew. It had one little flaw in design. You couldn't get out if it was hit because you had to bail out into the propellors, and nobody liked that idea.

We had a P-36, which was obsolete. We got a YP-37, which was one of two built. It was a P-36 with an Allison engine in the front of it, and it was a delightful airplane except that it was almost impossible to taxi the darn thing. You couldn't see forward. It was a big long nose. They moved the cockpit forward and shortened the fuselage down and that evolved into a thing called the P-40, and you've, of course, heard of those.

We had a Boulton Paul Defiant that none of our wrenches fit. That was a British airplane. It looked for all the world in the air like a Hawker Hurricane, but it had a turret, a Crocker-Wheeler turret in back of it. It didn't perform like a Hurricane, but the Germans would think it was a Hurricane that was having engine trouble or something, so they'd make a tail-end approach on it and get themselves shot down by a turret gun.

One day I was standing out there on the line and three Martin B-10 BM's came in. That was the famous Martin bomber of the mid-30s. I'd never seen one in my life. Of course, I knew all about them because I was an aviation-minded kid. And three of them came in! They were on a flying status and completely obsolete, but . . . .

In fact, we learned about B-24s on Martin bombers, would you believe? It was kind of exotic to try to learn a B-24 system when you're working on a Martin bomber. We worked on mockups, primarily. The only problem with that is that in a mockup, you can walk up to with a part that you needed to replace and replace it, but on a B-24, of course, you'd have to be in there on your belly doing it, with an oxygen mask on and 14 layers of clothes to keep from freezing to death. But they made good mechanics out of us.

One other thing. Maybe I told you about this before. The Colonel's Lady's victory garden. I loved it. As you might recall, in the Army routine on Saturday morning you made your bed up in what they call white collar. You put on your Class A uniform and

you went out and you had parade. After that you had a Class A inspection. Now, you prepared for that, and, of course, you had a GI party on Friday night. You had all your clothes cleaned and you had your footlocker arranged in the way it had to be and the correct number of shorts and undershirts and socks in there and your shaving gear arranged just so according to the picture on the bulletin board at the end of the barracks. Then, after the inspection was over, unless something really went bad or the inspecting officer was in a bad humor, you got Saturday afternoon and Sunday off, except in AM school, where you went for seven days a week.

This one particular Saturday Sergeant Evans came down and said that we had "volunteered" to put in the Colonel's Lady's victory garden. So we were all issued shovels. We looked like the CCC as we marched down around the end of the runway and marched over to the other side. There was a big grassy field. With pick and shovel, we spaded up this area. It seemed to me it was an area about the size of your back yard, maybe a little bigger. There were a lot of us, too. We spaded this thing up and the next weekend we went and raked it and we cultivated it. I don't know who did it but somebody other than us planted the thing.

Some time later we were in part of the mechanics school - we were still in basic training when we did the digging - and, as we were finishing mechanics school, we had a week of training called "field test." Field test was right hard next to that victory garden. By this time the watermelons and the canteloupes and all these things were getting ripe, so they had guards on it. We found out from people leaving field test, that what you do is go out there, you lie in the grass until the guard goes by, you get his attention. The next time he goes by, he'll drop a melon into your hands. I don't know if the Colonel's Lady got anything out of that garden because we stole everything that was ripe in that place and that was one little retribution. But nobody really cared for Colonel Goolrick, and especially his Lady because she stole five or six weekends from us and we needed the time off. I don't know. I guess she probably was blameless. But he was the butt of all of our frustrations, I think, at the time.

That reminds me of the Red Cross. At Keesler Field, when you were in mechanics school you could go to town a limited number of times, but before you could get a pass to go to town, you had to make a donation to the Red Cross. You had to buy the pass. A lot

of us didn't go to town much because there was nothing to do. I think I went to town maybe once or twice the whole time I where, and I was there from February until August or September. I resented having to give a couple of dollars to the Red Cross to get a pass to go to town, because a couple of dollars - heck, we were only making $50 a month and, if you went to town twice, that's almost a tenth of your pay just to give to the Red Cross. So when I left Keesler, I did it with a sigh of relief.

I went to Laredo for gunnery school. At gunnery, we only got a pass one weekend, and that was the time we all went to Nuevo Laredo, so passes were no big thing. But then at Casper, Wyoming, we could not get our pay until we donated to the Red Cross. We had to donate to the Red Cross before we got our pay.

Orders of Secretary of War Stimson.

Is that what that was? I resented that. . .

The Red Cross was real put out about that. They were also real put out about it because by orders of Secretary Stimson, they had to charge.

Well, that's just the thing that I was going to say is overseas. . . I needed a scarf because it was so cold, so I went to the Red Cross because you couldn't get a scarf in town. We didn't have any ration coupons. And so I went to the Red Cross. I forget how much they wanted for the scarf, $10 or something like that. I didn't have $10 because we spent our money. We drank it up as fast as we got it. So I had to go without a scarf because the Red Cross wouldn't give me one.

Secretary of the Army Stimson, Secretary of War. . .

I didn't know that because to this day I haven't given any money to the Red Cross.

That was done by orders of Secretary Stimson, the same one who in the late 20s was against setting up an intelligence community because "Gentlemen don't read each other's letters."

Yes, I remember that.

And in any overseas service club that in which any serviceman from another country entered, it was mandated by the Army that the Red Cross had to charge.

Well, and they charged us, of course. I found out in the clubs that they had where you could stay overnight, the price was just about the same as staying in a British civilian hotel.

There was a little hotel I found in London that was near Trafalgar Square. I could get a private room there with a Continental breakfast for about the same price that it would cost me to stay in a Red Cross place where you'd be in a room with 100 other men. You know, sometimes you'd just as soon sleep alone without all that noise, all that racket and guys coming in drunk. But occasionally you'd have to stay at a Red Cross club because there was no other place open, no other place available. Sometimes we'd get in late; you could get in a Red Cross place. But, I'll tell you, I've kind of had it in for the Red Cross ever since. It's only 50 years. I forget rapidly.

That's what the background on that was.

I had no idea. I thought it just the avarice and greed on the part of the Red Cross.

It was by the order of the Army because "we did not want our soldiers to feel that they were being given a gift because this sets up the wrong frame of life for them." That was rationale on it.

I was just freezing. That was the reason I wanted a scarf. I was fighting his war, too.

Yes, you were fighting his war, and, very probably,you were fighting some of it because gentlemen didn't read each other's letters.

That's right.

Seriously, let me raise a question. Was Trafalgar Square full of pigeons in those days that looked worse than any pigeons you've ever seen anyplace else?

I don't remember them looking worse. Remember, at that point, I was raised in San Francisco and, you see, this is comparing extremes, because the ones in San Francisco are pretty ratty, too. If you remember Elmer Robbins spent his entire career as mayor trying to kill off pigeons around city hall. They were despoiling all the blue and gold paint and all the wrought iron and he had little iron owls all over the place. They were rotten looking pigeons. But, then, again, have you ever seen a pigeon that's not rotten looking? I mean, regular wild pigeons.

Most of them are a little on the tacky side, but those at Trafalgar are beyond belief.

You know, I did love London, though. I went there every time I got a pass. . . I was really kind of untypical. There were three movies in London at that time, and one of them showed "Up In Arms" the entire time I was overseas. One of them showed "Cover

Girl" and one of them showed "Going My Way" all of the time I was there. And I saw them all.

I went to the Windmill Theater in Soho one night, and I thought that was kind of fascinating. I don't think I'd ever seen a naked girl before. Of course, they were a long ways away.

But I spent a lot of time walking across London Bridge, and walking through Westminister Abbey. Got thrown out of Buckingham Palace one time. I met a girl who was a Dutch woman, from the Netherlands. She was an RN. She and I had about the same amount of reverence for the British royal family. We were standing there making comments about it, and one of the guards came along and asked us to leave. But I was really impressed with those guys. They didn't do all that fancy changing of the guard in those days, but they stood there. You know, they looked at a spot on the pavement or something. They stood there at attention for hours on end. I don't know how they did it, but they did it.

Another thing I enjoyed an awful lot was Hyde Park Corner, because a guy would stand there and he would preach open sedition. There'd be a London bobby standing there protecting his right to speech, right of free speech, and his right to preach open sedition, as long as he stayed at Hyde Park Corner. Get off the Corner and say that and they'd throw him in the slammer. But at Hyde Park Corner, by golly, you could say anything you wanted.

There are fascinating lessons we learned. You know, it was a rare and wonderful opportunity for a kid to broaden his experience and to come into the world.

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